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# POLITICAL ELITES IN COUNTRIES OF THE BALTIC SEA REGION

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## THE STRUCTURE OF POLITICAL ELITE NETWORKS IN THE REPUBLIC OF POLAND IN 1993—2013

E. Fidrya\*



*The author aims to identify the structure of network ties within Polish political elites, study the features of network ties formation and the impact that both primary and labour socialisation periods and diaspora characteristics have on this process; to describe the structural characteristics of the resulting networks over different periods of time and analyse the structural dynamics of political elites for the purpose of forecasting major trends in the transformation of Polish political elites.*

*In the course of the study the author collected and processed biographical data on the presidents, ministers, advisors, and party leaders of the Republic of Poland. The work follows the network analysis paradigm and identifies the dynamics of the key network parameters: distance, density, transitivity, and compactness. The author analyses the dynamics of representation in the structure of political territorial diaspora elites, business community members, and 'moral politicians'. The article identifies two periods of formation of political party networks in Poland. The first period (1993—2007) saw a transition from rather weakly integrated systems to highly dense and cohesive networks as early as during the second electoral cycle, after which a gradual decrease in the key indices of network integration was registered. A new peak of network cohesion and integration was reached in 2007—2011; however, the death of some key members of political elites in a plane crash brought the network integration indices down to the levels of 2001—2005.*

*On the whole, the network structure of Polish political elite is characterised by unstable dynamics relating to the crisis events of the past. However, these elites have a pronounced diaspora core and an unstable periphery; the share of businesspeople directly participating in political processes is decreasing, whereas 'moral politicians' usually take an active part in the formation of political elites.*

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The political elites of the Republic of Poland, as well as those of many other Eastern European states, underwent a process of radical restructuring in the early 1990s: new groups got an opportunity to come to power, new channels of political recruitment were opened, new clusters of intra-elite connection and new poles of influence began to develop. The major benchmarks of these processes have become the focus of interest of Russian and international researchers [1—8], however, a structural analysis of the transformation of Polish elite configuration has not yet been conducted. Moreover most works dedicated to political elites rely on a qualitative analysis of data presented in documents and interviews, which complicates comparative studies into transformation processes and formalised juxtaposition of political elite configuration.

In this work, structural changes in political elites in 1993—2013 are studied using the network analysis method. It helps to identify the actual structure of network connections within political elites, study the genetic features of these connections that emerged in the course of primary and professional socialisation, identify the influence of diaspora communities on the formation of the Polish political elites, detect the key network features of political elites, identify stable cluster within them, their nature and characteristics features, as well as their role in political elite structuring, and, finally, analyse the structural dynamics of political elites, which can become a basis for a general forecast of the trends in structural transformation of Polish political elites.

Political elites are here understood as actors (individuals of groups) capable of exerting continuous and considerable influence on political outcomes due to their strategic position in large organisations [9; 10]. Thus, the political influence of an actor depends on their position in the structure of the formal political hierarchy, which makes it possible to identify a stable set of positions for the network configuration analysis. The analysis is based on a number of principles: the agents and their actions are interpreted from the perspective of interdependence; the connections between agents are viewed as channels for the transfer of resource flows; the political structure can be interpreted as a model of continuous interaction between agents [11]. A significant contribution to the development of network analysis was made by David Knoke, who claims that the political influence of a certain agent can be identified only in the framework of interactions with other participants of the political process [12].

The sample comprised actors holding the following positions:

- presidents and their advisors,
- prime ministers and their advisors,
- speakers of the Sejm and their advisors;
- vice-prime ministers, vice-speakers, ministers (holding their position for at least one year);
- leaders of the key political parties (parliamentary parties).

Data on 239 Polish politicians falling into the above categories was analysed; 44 of the subjects either had served as president or held a position in the president's office, 167 held positions in the government, and 28 were

members of the Sejm. Standardised information offering the necessary biographical data was retrieved from references available at the official sites of the president of the Republic of Poland (<http://www.president.pl>), the Government of the Republic of Poland (<http://www.poland.gov.pl>), and the Sejm of the Republic of Poland (<http://www.sejm.gov.pl>). To gain a more comprehensive picture of the dynamics trends, each parliamentary electoral cycle was analysed and the results were compared. The sample size  $N$  for each electoral cycle is given in table 1.

Table 1

**Sample size by electoral cycles, people**

Cycle	$N$
1993—1997	38
1997—2001	41
2001—2005	40
2005—2007	39
2007—2011	45
2011—2015	36

The position of presidential advisor was introduced in 2005, thus presidential advisors are not included into the political elite network structure of the first three electoral cycles. To make the comparison of networks according to a number of properties possible and correct, I excluded the actors holding these positions during the last three cycles. In the sections where network structure are analysed separately these actors are included in the structure and taken into account in the course of analysis.

In this study, network analysis makes it possible to achieve a number of important research objectives:

- 1) the identification of the relative position of the political agents under consideration — the members of the political elite and their groups, as well as the structure and connection;
- 2) the statistical measurement of the basis parameters of the network itself; the description of the degree of its integration;
- 3) the qualitative characteristic of the agents' structural position and the role in the networks, as well as the assessment of dynamics of structural parameters of political agents in the course of the political system development.

### 1. Network structure parameters

It is necessary to make comments on the crucial concepts of this work: network size, network density and transitivity.

*Network size* characterises the maximum distance between any two vertices of the network graph and thus equals the maximum distance between any two agents of the network<sup>1</sup>. In the studied period, the size of the political

<sup>1</sup> Here and further on, unless specified otherwise, the parameters were calculated with the help of *UCInet 6.365* software.

elite network equalled 2 in most cases (3 in the last election cycle); it means that the longest sequences include three agents (four in the last cycle). It is interesting to note that the percentage distribution of shorter links included only one or three agents (Table 2).

Table 2

**Network distance parameters, %**

Network parameter	1993—1997	1997—2001	2001—2005	2005—2007	2007—2011	2011—2015
Distance = 1	74.4 <sup>2</sup>	85.7	81.7	82.5	86.7	81.8
Distance = 2	25.6	14.3	18.2	17.5	13.3	17.7
Distance = 3	—	—	—	—	—	0.5
<i>Average distance</i>	1.256	1.143	1.185	1.175	1.133	1.187

The average network distance (average distance between all network agents) is at its shortest in 2007—2011, however, in 1997—2001, the distance was also quite minimal. The ‘longest’ links were observed in 1993—1997, which can be explained by the beginning of internal link formation and integration (this period also shows the highest share of sequences consisting of three agents).

*Network density.* This network structure parameter characterises the relation between the existing and possible connections linking members of power groups. Table 3 shows that the network density reached its maximum in 2005—2011.

Table 3

**Network density parameters**

Network parameter	1993—1997	1997—2001	2001—2005	2005—2007	2007—2011	2011—2015
Density	1.0014	1.3634	1.2782	1.4012	1.3818	1.3670
Compactness	0.872	0.929	0.908	0.913	0.933	0.908

Another parameter of network density is network compactness. This parameter is calculated on the basis of network density and equals the normalised sum inverse to all distances. The 1997—2001 and 2007—2011 periods show significant compactness.

<sup>2</sup> This parameter is calculated through changing shortest distances between the vertices of the network graph drawn for each period.

*Transitivity* is also one of the general network characteristics. This property relates to the connection between three agents, where, if two out of three vertices are linked, the third pair is linked, too<sup>3</sup>. To a degree, this property relates to the capacity of network links to generate internal links and stable substructures, which is indicative of the internal cohesion of network substructures (Table 4).

Table 4

#### Network transitivity, %

Network parameter	1993—1997	1997—2001	2001—2005	2005—2007	2007—2011	2011—2015
Transitivity	81.95	83.16	76.59	75.16	82.63	77.74

Table 4 shows that the peak transitivity (83.16 %) was reached in 1997—2001, after which it radically declined; only in 2007—2011, transitivity reaches a high level.

## 2. Dynamics of the internal structure of Polish political elites

The analysis of transformation of political elites and their recruiting mechanism in the former member states of the Warsaw Bloc usually identifies several channels — both specific and general ones: business community, intellectuals, regional and international diasporas. Let us consider the dynamics of the presence of these groups in the Polish political elite structure.

### 2.1. ‘Moral politicians’ (scholars, cultural figures, artists)

In the Baltics, intellectuals played a significant role in the political transformation of the early 1990s. The ‘moral politicians’ [3; 13] who were representing structural opposition in the political space, served as an agent possessing symbolic capital — the legitimate right to express qualified opinions about the socio-political organisation of their countries. At the same time, a lack of administrative experience and the loss of the structural role undermined the right of this group to claim political power [14].

Thus, the presence of politicians with backgrounds in education, research, healthcare, culture, and art was rather strong throughout the studied period and ranged from 49 to 63 %. It is a high percentage; however, many Polish politicians sought employment at education and research institutions after holding ministerial positions in the fields of finance and economy or being involved in the legislative activities as members of the Sejm. They

<sup>3</sup> The principle of adjacency was used for calculating transitivity: the  $x_{ik}$ ,  $x_{ij}$ ,  $x_{jk}$  triad is considered transitive, if the value of  $x_{ik}$  link is 1, under the condition that  $x_{ij}$  and  $x_{jk}$  also equal 1.

cannot be considered ‘moral politicians’ without certain reservations — rather, they are ‘products’ of an inverse process. Thus, it seems justified to present data on the specified weight of ‘moral politicians’ according to a stricter definition: only those politicians who had professional experience in the fields of arts, culture, healthcare, science and education before assuming high political posts and those who had worked in at least two organisations in the mentioned fields.

In this case, the share of ‘moral politicians’ in the structure of political elites decreases dramatically (Table 5). At the same, we see that dynamics of their presence in the Polish elites makes it possible to identify three periods: 1) 1993—2001, when the share of ‘moral politicians’ was rather significant; 2) 2001—2007, when their presence was minimum; 3) 2007–, when the percentage of ‘moral politicians’ increased (however, according to the strict definition, it was rather low).

Table 5

**Presence of ‘moral politicians’ in the political elite structure**

Network parameter	1993—1997	1997—2001	2001—2005	2005—2007	2007—2011	2011—2015
<i>N</i> , people	38	41	40	39	45	36
The share of ‘moral politicians’, %	55.3	63.4	50.0	48.7	57.8	61.1
‘Strictly defined’ share, %	23.7	26.8	15.0	17.9	26.7	19.4

*Source:* Calculated by the author.

Over the studied period, ‘moral politicians’ did not only head the ‘industry-specific’ ministries of healthcare, culture, national education and science, sports and tourism, and environment, but also served as prime minister, heads of ministries of foreign affairs, justice, finance, national defence, transport, national treasury, communications, and regional development; they chaired parties and party associations and served as ministers without portfolio and presidential advisors.

## ***2.2. Diaspora members. Territorial affiliation***

In the Baltics, ethnic Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians, who returned to their countries from the West (first of all, from the USA), played an important role in the development of new political structures and statehood in general [15, c. 115]. It seems reasonable to identify the structure diaspora communities within Polish political elites, as well as the dynamics of its composition.

The affiliation with a diaspora community is established by the place of birth and that of primary, secondary, and higher education (as an indicator of the place of socialisation of future members of power structures). As the criterion for including an agent into a certain group identified on the basis of primary socialisation environment, I used factual evidence of them being or receiving education in schools and universities of Warsaw, one of the voivodeships, certain republics of the Soviet Union or of a Warsaw Bloc state, or a Western European country (Table 6).

Table 6

**Percentage of diaspora members in the structure of political elites, %**

Period	WR	MZ	DS	KP	LU	LB	LD	MA	OP	PK	PD	PM	SK	SL	WP	WN	ZP	WE	SU
1993—1997	<i>16</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>3</i>		<i>5</i>	<i>3</i>		<i>3</i>	<i>5</i>		<i>8</i>	<i>3</i>		<i>3</i>		<i>8</i>
1997—2001	<i>12</i>	<i>7.3</i>	<i>7.3</i>	<i>4.9</i>			<i>4.9</i>	<i>4.9</i>		<i>4.9</i>		<i>12</i>	<i>4.9</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>9.8</i>		<i>2.4</i>	<i>4.9</i>	<i>4.9</i>
2001—2005	<i>20</i>	<i>2.5</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>5</i>		<i>13</i>	<i>5</i>				<i>15</i>	<i>2.5</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>2.5</i>		<i>13</i>		
2005—2007	<i>21</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>5.1</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>2.6</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>7.7</i>	<i>5.1</i>				<i>10</i>	<i>2.6</i>	<i>2.6</i>	<i>2.6</i>	<i>2.6</i>			
2007—2011	<i>16</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>6.7</i>	<i>8.9</i>	<i>6.7</i>	<i>6.7</i>	<i>4.4</i>	<i>4.4</i>	<i>4.4</i>	<i>4.4</i>		<i>13</i>		<i>2.2</i>	<i>2.2</i>	<i>4.4</i>		<i>2.2</i>	
2011—2015	<i>14</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>8.3</i>	<i>5.6</i>	<i>5.6</i>			<i>8.3</i>	<i>2.8</i>	<i>2.8</i>		<i>8.3</i>	<i>2.8</i>	<i>5.6</i>	<i>5.6</i>	<i>2.8</i>	<i>2.8</i>	<i>2.8</i>	
<i>Total</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>6.7</i>	<i>6.7</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>3.3</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>5.4</i>	<i>1.7</i>	<i>2.1</i>	<i>0.4</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>2.1</i>	<i>5.9</i>	<i>4.2</i>	<i>1.7</i>	<i>3.3</i>	<i>1.7</i>	<i>2.1</i>

*Legend:*

WR — Warsaw;	PD — Podlaskien voivodeship;
MZ — Masovian voivodeship;	PM — Pomeranian voivodeship;
DS — Lower Silesian voivodeship;	SK — Holy Cross voivodeship;
KP — Kuyavian-Pomeranian voivodeship;	SL — Silesian voivodeship;
LU — Lublin voivodeship;	WP — Greater Poland voivodeship;
LB — Lubusz voivodeship;	WN — Warmian-Masurian voivodeship;
LD — Łódź voivodeship;	ZP — West Pomeranian voivodeship;
MA — Lesser Poland voivodeship;	WE — Western European countries;
OP — Opole voivodeship;	SU — republics of the USSR and the
PK — Subcarpathian voivodeship;	Warsaw Bloc.

Regions with the strongest presence in the electoral cycles are shown in italics.

*Source:* calculated by the author.

As table 6 shows, the repatriates from the Western countries — France, the UK — were poorly represented in the Polish political diasporas. The formal ministerial positions held by them did not make it possible to exert significant influence on the political processes.

The share of politicians with a ‘Soviet’ background was rather high only in the first two parliamentary cycles: as a rule, these politicians — predominantly from Ukraine — held positions in the ministries of the interior and national defence. The only exception is J. Buzek, who was born in the Czech Republic and served as a Prime Minister.



### 2.3. Business community

From the perspective of the presence of business community members in the elite structure, Poland is quite an interesting case. In comparison to most post-Soviet republics and former Warsaw Bloc member states, the share of individuals with experience of managing commercial structure is decreasing rather than increasing (Table 7).

Table 7

**Percentage of politicians with a business background**

Network parameter	1993—1997	1997—2001	2001—2005	2005—2007	2007—2011	2011—2015
<i>N</i> , people	38	41	40	39	45	36
Share of business community members, %	15.8	24.4	17.5	10.3	11.1	11.1

*Source:* calculated by the author.

The strongest presence of business community within political elites was registered in 1997—2001, when it accounted for almost one fourth of all elite members. Before holding a political position, most ‘business politicians’ managed telecommunications, investment, and consulting companies. In most cases, members of Polish political elites gained commercial experience when managing commercial banks and telecommunications or energy companies. Some of them worked in the fields of development, pharmaceuticals, and tourism.

### Conclusions

Over the years since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the ‘bipolar world’, the networks of Polish political elites have undergone restructuring more than once. The period, when these networks could develop gradually, was followed by a dramatic ‘stress’, which introduced a new centre of influence and formed new substructure configurations. One can make the following conclusions about the structure and dynamics of the Polish political elites in 1993—2013.

1. There are two periods to the formation of Polish political elite networks:
  - 1993—2007 — includes four electoral cycles and is characterised by a transfer from the relatively disintegrated networks of 1993—1997 to the density and cohesion of 1997—2011 followed by a decrease in the key network integration parameters until 2007;
  - 2007—2011 — the formation of a new configuration of Polish political elites characterised by increased cohesion and integration. The tragic events of 2010 resulted in a new transformation of the network structure of Polish political elites and a decrease in the network integration parameters to the level of 2001—2005.
2. ‘Moral politicians’ have strong presence in the structure of Polish political elite networks: throughout the studied period, they accounted for up to two thirds of political elite members according to the ‘soft’ definition and one fourth accord-

ing to the 'strict' one. The data obtained do not make it possible to come to arrive at any conclusions about the linear dynamics; three periods were identified:

- 1993—2001, when the presence of 'moral politicians' was rather strong;
- 2001—2007, when the share of 'moral politicians' reached its minimum;
- after 2007, when their prominence increased again.

One should stress the direct correlation between the transitivity of political elites and the 'strict' percentage of 'moral' politicians. Perhaps, it can be explained by that 'professional' circles generate transitive connections offering their members additional social capital.

3. Throughout the recent history of Polish politics, the leading roles have been played by Varsovians and politicians from the Masovian (excluding Warsaw) and Pomeranian voivodeships. Over the two latter periods, the diaspora composition became more diverse, the presence of politicians from the Lower Silesian, Lesser Poland, and Kuyavian-Pomeranian voivodeships became stronger. Politicians from these diasporas were more likely to hold the key structural positions — those of President, Prime Minister, Marshal of the Sejm, a party leader. Foreign diasporas did not play a significant role in the structure of Polish political elite networks: repatriates from the Western countries do not have strong presence in the Polish political networks, whereas the share of those with a 'Soviet' background was rather high only in the first two parliamentary cycles.

4. The share of politicians with a business background decreased over the studied period. Such background is more typical for ministers often holding positions in 'industry-specific' ministries. Single actors with business experience serve in the President's office. The Sejm is headed mostly by professional politicians without a business background. One can suppose that Poland achieved the state when businesses pursue their interest through lobbying rather than direct participation in the political process earlier than other 'transitional' countries. The role of businesspeople holding ministerial positions is viewed as the application of their valuable administrative experience.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that throughout the period studied the networks of Polish political elites had a pronounced diaspora core constituted by politicians from Warsaw and the Masovian voivodeship. The periphery is rather diverse. If in the first cycles it brought together members of foreign diasporas (countries of the West or the former Warsaw Bloc), at the recent stage representatives of other voivodeships account for the territorial diversification. Businesspeople tend to distance themselves from direct participation in the political networks, whereas the share of 'moral politicians' remains rather high and possibly affects the transitivity of political networks.

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